

Flood Protection Corridor Program
Direct Expenditure Candidate Project Summary

Project Name: Feeney-Lerch Ranch

Primary Proponent: Department of Water Resources

Total Project Cost: Estimated to be \$1,300,000.

Flood Protection Corridor Program Cost: \$1,300,000.

Funding Partners: There are no funding partners.

Project Summary: In 1977/78, the Reclamation Board contracted with Murray, Burns, and Kienlen (now MBK Engineering), to inventory the Sacramento River and identify parcels along the River that could be purchased by The Reclamation Board as a way to preserve riparian vegetation in the active meander zone between Tisdale Weir and Hamilton City and to preserve and enhance the capacity of the floodway. The Feeney-Lerch Ranch was one such property (MBK sites 26 & 27). However, during negotiations to acquire the parcel, the program ran out of money. The parcel is still for sale and Mr. Ken Lerch has reinitiated contact with DWR staff for the purpose of offering up his property once again for sale.

The property is one half mile south of the town of Glenn in Glenn County. It contains somewhere between 175 acres and 264 acres, depending on accretion due to river meander. Actual amount will be determined by cadastral survey. Approximately 65 percent of the property is east of the River. Of the 35 percent west of the river, approximately three-fourths is on the water side of the levee and the remaining 20 acres (planted in walnuts) are on the land side.

In addition to 24.5 acres of producing walnut trees, the property west of the river supports two large, dense stands of mature riparian habitat long established on the riverbank. The remaining portion lies within the floodway/meander zone. The eastern portion (east side of the Sacramento River) lies on the western edge of Hartley Island abutting a Nature Conservancy site (RM 173). The remaining portion comprises another depositional berm partly occluding an old meander on the western side of the River (~RM 173.5). Both in-channel sites support developing and mature riparian habitat.

Flood Benefits: The Sacramento River Conservation Area and the Reclamation Board have the mutual goal of securing flowage easements and/or fee title to frequently inundated lands within the Sacramento River flood corridor. The Feeney-Lerch Ranch contains two stands of mature riparian woodland growing on the upstream and downstream western bank and developing riparian habitat on two depositional berms within the active meander belt. In addition, the site, located between River Miles 172 and 174, lies within the active river meander

belt and is still subject to natural hydraulic and fluvial processes that will be preserved if the Ranch is purchased. Aerial photographs of the Ranch show negligible change in the inner river zone features in the past 20 years. These features will be retained with the purchase of the Ranch.

Wildlife Benefits: The Ranch is located between River Miles 172 and 174. Portions of the Ranch both in-stream and adjacent to the bank support an extraordinarily robust and diverse riparian forest. The wooded areas on the bank contain extensive numbers of mature elderberry shrubs as well. Both the climax vegetation on the bank and the developing riparian scrub-shrub and more mature trees on the depositional berms provide habitat for many mammal and bird species as well as woody debris for aquatic species. The bank (between the upstream and downstream riparian areas) itself supports an active bank swallow community. The Department of Fish and Game has associated the decline of bank swallows and their subsequent State threatened status listing to the loss of vertical earthen bank habitat associated with Reclamation Board bank protection projects. The purchase and subsequent protection of this site will preserve the natural fluvial processes and continue to provide excellent rearing and migratory habitat for Chinook salmon and steelhead.

Agricultural Land Conservation Benefits: The Ranch has several varieties of walnut trees under production. Mr. Lerch has leased the trees and shares the profits with a tenant. The portion of the Ranch on the landside of the levee with producing trees may be sold (Water Code Sections 79037 and 79039). A decision on what to do with the remaining waterside walnut trees has not been made, but they will most likely be removed and replaced by native riparian species.

Link to State Interest: The State by way of the Reclamation Board has had an interest in the Ranch since 1978 but no funds to purchase the site. In addition, The Sacramento River Conservation Area program, of which DWR, DFG, and the Wildlife Conservation Board actively participate, seeks to acquire riparian areas within the active meander belt.

Status of Decision to Award FPCP Funds: Project is recommended for direct expenditure funds.

FPCP Project Evaluation Team Action: This project was ranked third of eleven projects considered for direct expenditure funding in 2001.